



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

FRENCH VERSUS ANGLO-SAXON IMMORALITY.

BY MAX O'RELL.

Two years and a half ago, at a Chicago dinner-table, the conversation turned upon the subject of the coming World's Fair and its probable effect upon America in general and Chicago in particular. Great was my amusement at hearing one of the guests relate that a certain Chicago lady had given it as her opinion that the Exposition was likely to do a great deal of harm, because it would attract numbers of foreigners, and the morals of Chicago would be corrupted. The French especially were particularly feared by this Chicago lady, who expressed her determination to be absent from the great city during the World's Fair, in order to escape contamination.

Chicago morals! You will excuse me if I roared, won't you?

As one who has knocked about the world a great deal and seen many foreigners at home, I should like to be permitted to say a few words on this to me very interesting subject, for I am getting pretty sick of hearing idiotic imputations of this kind from the Anglo-Saxon representatives of pharisaism.

And, at the threshold of these remarks, let me state my firm conviction—one that deepens every year as I see more of the world—that one nation is neither better nor worse than another, but only different, that is all: different in its ways, in its tastes, in its virtues, and in its vices. Would that, all over the world, this were the teaching to be heard from every platform and every pulpit! One nation is not more virtuous or more immoral than another; it is merely different in its way of showing its virtues and hiding its vices. Nations are like individuals: in their morality, they are hypocritical or sincere; in their immoral-

ality they are sly, ugly, unclean, above-board, honest, picturesque, coarse, refined, as the case may be.

So much for the world in general. Now to particularize.

Let us take the French nation as representing the Latin race, and compare it with the Anglo-Saxon one as found in America, in England, and the British colonies. I have no intention of holding up my countrymen as models of virtue, having already affirmed my belief in the universal frailty of man, in which I believe as firmly as in the universal goodness of woman; but just as a sin confessed is half atoned for, I claim that such vice as may exist—as does unfortunately exist—in France loses some of its ugliness by its refusal to masquerade as virtue.

To take the question of drink, for instance.

France is a country where temperance is properly understood, where man uses and enjoys the divine gift of wine with which a fertile soil has supplied him, and he is not ashamed to own it. He uses and enjoys it, as becomes a man, moderately. *Temperance* means *moderation*, and has never meant *total abstinence*. When a Frenchman takes his glass of wine, he does so *coram populo*. When the Parisian takes his absinthe (few Frenchmen outside of Paris do take it), he does not hide himself. He takes it on a table outside the café, and, much as I deplore the increasing consumption of this beverage, I have never seen a Frenchman take it until he gets tipsy.

In the British colonies, at the hotels, you will see men take tea or water with their meals. That is what they do in the presence of their fellow-creatures; but they spend the evening at the bar quietly, sadly imbibing whiskey till they are unable to get to their bedrooms unaided. In the prohibition States of America, I have seen men drink liquor, like castor-oil, out of a little graduated glass, in the drug stores. Everybody in America knows that this is so. Once a day, after lecturing, I take a little stimulant, a glass of hot grog. In the prohibition States I had to take it behind the counter of a chemist, or down in the cellar of the hotel. On one occasion it was sent to my bedroom, carefully wrapped up in brown paper, with a label, "The mixture as before."

This is truly edifying!

It seems to me that the sly obtaining and drinking of spirits in this fashion is likely to do as much harm to a young man's moral character as ever the dram itself could do to his body. But

this is always the attitude of Anglo-Saxon pharisaism: "Let us hide certain failings out of sight, and pretend to the world that they do not exist, while we draw attention to our virtues and pray for the conversion of the French."

In this spirit, London vaunts itself that it possesses no state-visited houses of ill-fame, whilst, all the while, its great West-End thoroughfares are literally swarming with poor, wretched creatures from sunset to early morn—a sight unparalleled in the world. Whence this overpowering impulse to wrap the pharisee's cloak around one and cry, "Stand aside, for I am holier than thou"? It is an attitude ugly and unchristian enough in the most virtuous person, but despicable and disgusting in those who use the cloak as a cover for a multitude of sins.

I have often had Anglo-Saxons hurl at my head the number of French unfortunates who are to be seen in the West End of London. My answer has always been that if they were not less appreciated in France than in England, in France they would undoubtedly remain. Surely it is not the climate and atmosphere of London that tempt them to cross the English Channel.

French immorality is often refined, artistic, Attic. Anglo-Saxon immorality is gross, brutal, and debasing, and perhaps, on that account, less attractive and therefore less dangerous.

Whoever has known anything of life in Paris knows that the young man who has a *liaison* plays at an imitation of the best days of matrimonial life, which does not entail the laying aside of all self-respect and respect for woman. He takes his *Fifine* for walks, drives, and picnics. He takes her to the restaurant, to the theatre, and is not ashamed, I am sorry to say, to be discovered in her company. For a time he brings this woman up to his level, and behaves in her presence almost as he would in the presence of a respected wife. The Anglo-Saxon, for the time being, behaves "like a brute beast that has no understanding." As with the drinking of whiskey in the prohibition States or the taking of absinthe in France, so with woman in Anglo-Saxon land or in France.

"All this is very well," will perhaps exclaim some Anglo-Saxon; "but look at your Moulin-Rouge and Jardin-de-Paris and such places! See how they flourish!"

Alas, yes, they rather flourish, I grieve to say, but thanks to whom? One stroll around any one of them will convince you

that but for the foreigner these places would have to close their doors. Englishmen, Americans, Spaniards, Italians, foreigners from all parts of the world, come to Paris on pleasure bent, crowd those places, and return to their respective countries with "impressions" of France and her people. But the people of France are not there. These resorts entirely depend on the visitors to Paris, just as do the venders of most objectionable illustrated sheets that are sold on the Boulevards. The last time I was in Paris as I was buying a paper of one of the women who keep the kiosks where the daily papers are sold, a man came and, in broken French, asked her for a copy of one of the above-mentioned sheets, representing *danseuses* in all sorts of attitudes, and with which hoarse huxters pester the frequenters of the cafés.

"We do not sell those things (*ces saletés-là*)," replied the good woman. And, turning to me, she added: "Only foreigners buy that" (*Il n'y a que les étrangers qui achètent ça*).

The young Englishman or American, as he peruses this literature, is quite convinced that he is reading what the French enjoy, and he goes on concluding that the French are a very immoral people.

To be sure, there are thousands and thousands of foreigners who come to Paris every year to visit its magnificent museums, hear its new plays, enjoy its lovely drives, especially from England and America, I am glad to say; but, alas, how many also, because they have heard of resorts of gayety in that city, come only to visit its objectionable places where no Frenchman who respects himself a little ever sets foot! There are thousands of foreigners who are acquainted with what is most refined, beautiful, and lofty in French literature; but how many are there who know M. Zola's name and who, without being able to appreciate the literary value of his works, fling at our faces second-hand criticisms on their so-called immorality? These Anglo-Saxons will tell you that M. Zola handles very shocking subjects in his novels, and that, in France, he is the most popular writer of the day. You would think, perhaps, that they therefore avoid reading the works of M. Zola. What are the facts? The manager of the greatest French bookselling firm in London told me that his house alone had sold over thirty thousand copies of *La Terre*, by far the most objectionable of the great writer's novels, and that no book had ever sold to that extent in London. Figures like these speak for themselves. And they

even say a great deal more than appears on the surface. The French are an artistic people. In literature, elegant style and dramatic power stand first and foremost with them. M. Zola being undeniably a great artist and a most powerful dramatist, his countrymen read him for the sake of his style and of his wonderful attainments, even when loathing his subjects and regretting the manner in which he handles them. But, often, this is not why Anglo-Saxons read him, for I venture to say that not one foreigner out of a thousand is able to appreciate half the beauty of his works in the matter of style. Frenchmen read and enjoy the writings of M. Zola *although* they are sometimes coarse (I deny that they are immoral) ; Anglo-Saxons often read them *because* they expect to find them so.

Now all this is very plain speaking ; but I was not born an Anglo-Saxon, and I think that one of the greatest treats in life is to be able to look at people straight in the face, and to speak the good, healthy, plain, honest truth.

To return to Chicago, from whence I started. The day after the dinner-party, I mentioned the Chicago lady's pious regret at the threatened influx of foreigners to a friend of mine, who is a sincere hater of self-righteousness. He invited me to follow him and take one glimpse at hidden Chicago. That glimpse was a terrible revelation, although I had never had any illusion concerning the relative blackness or whiteness of Chicago or of any other large centre of population. Alas, Chicago is like any other great city: it has its very black spots, and if you make careful inquiries as to where they are, and if you get properly directed, there is a chance for you to find them out ; with this difference between French and Anglo-Saxon cities—that in the former there exists very little more than what you see ; whereas, in the latter, with the exception of London, most of it is hidden.

As I said before, man is not better in one part of the civilized world than in another : he is different.

It is absurd for the crock which contains unutterable dives and home-grown Nautch girls to call attention to the hue of the kettle whose darkest spots are gaudy gardens frequented by gay, cheerful, and elegant *demi-mondaines*. Vice that is gay is not hopeless. Sombre, unsmiling vice is incurable.

It is high time that international stone-throwing should cease, now that all the world travels and can see for itself. It is not alone

to outsiders like myself that the ugly stone-throwing virtuousness of Anglo-Saxons appears as the great offence of an otherwise great people. In one of the most earnest and stirring sermons it has ever been my fortune to hear, Archdeacon Farrar brought home the charge to the English, comparing their rigid, angular self-righteousness to that of the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son. The excellent Chicago lady is only a humble private in the army of the stone-throwing Christians. It is an army appalling in its numbers, whose commanders fill the world with self-applause, and so much assurance do they put into the manner of doing it that even charitable and true Christians are carried away and have a lurking suspicion that the foreigner cannot hope to ever rival the English in goodness.

Oh, my dear Anglo-Saxon friends, do take it out of your heads that you are more moral than other people. Be a little modest. Try to be satisfied and comforted by the thought that, probably, you are not worse. You have performed wonderful achievements. You are little by little quietly securing all that is worth having on the surface of the earth. Do leave us something—our character, for instance. You push us aside in every part of the globe. It would really be so kind of you not to take away from us the hope that one day we may have a little corner in the abode of the seraphs.

I know the West-End and the East-End of London ; I have seen Argyle street, in Glasgow ; High street and the Canongate, in Edinburgh, on Saturday nights ; I have visited the dives of Chicago, the dens of New York and San Francisco ; I have seen the gambling-hells of Denver and the rest. I have seen Paris in all its nooks and corners, and I really cannot make up my mind that Anglo-Saxon land scores in the comparison.

Everywhere, in every shape or form, immorality and vice are detestable, and I condone them neither in the French nor in the Anglo-Saxon. To show that, when the Frenchman is immoral, he is not more so than the Anglo-Saxon, but *differently so*, is the only aim of these remarks.

MAX O'RELL.